



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

FOLKtalk

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 48 Summer
2015

Welcome to the 2015 Summer FOLK newsletter. In this issue:

Front page –FOLK at the Cheltenham Summer Fiesta

Page 2 – Word from Wayne ; Page 3 – Report from Natural England Page 4 – Introducing a FOLK member;
Page 5 – Tribute to Brian Phillips Page 6 – FOLK work party report Page 9 – Smokesignals, short items.

FOLK at the Midsummer Fiesta in the Montpellier Gardens

In hot sunshine on Saturday July 4th, FOLK met the public at the Cheltenham Borough Council sponsored fifth annual Midsummer Fiesta in Montpellier Gardens. FOLK joined over 90 stallholders in the market place to meet the residents of Cheltenham and visitors from far and wide.

FOLK attendance at the Fiesta was part of our effort to recruit new members. An estimated 10,000 people visited the Fiesta and many came to our stall to find out more about FOLK.



Visitors showing an interest in the FOLK stall



Introducing FOLK to the new members

40 children took part in a popular nature quiz, with a prize of a family day out at the Cotswold Farm Park. There will be a presentation to the lucky winner soon. For newly signed up members there was also a prize draw. The successful member will be enjoying a meal for two at the Royal in Charlton Kings. We would like to thank the Royal and the Cotswold Farm Park for their generous sponsorship.

Nine FOLK members manned the stall on a rota. There was lively interest from the opening of the Fiesta at midday until the doors closed at 6 o'clock. Many visitors paused to look at our stand, expressing support and thanks for the work done by FOLK to maintain the commons for public use.

We recruited 15 new members including Alex Chalk, Cheltenham's newly elected MP. One hundred visitors took away our new business card, handouts about FOLK and membership forms to fill in later.

The event was judged a real success for FOLK in informing existing users of the Hill about our organisation and what we do and advertising the many attractions of Leckhampton Hill to people who haven't yet visited the site.

Experience gained at the Fiesta will help in planning attendance at future events in our drive to encourage people to get out onto the Hill and of course to increase our membership.

The Word from Wayne

As part of local involvement in the **Magnificent Meadows** project, soil at various places on the site has been tested to check if the Hill is suitable for spreading wildflower seeds. In July a third of Cowslip meadow will be



Walking the Cotswold Way through Cowslip Meadow

harvested using a machine that recovers wildflower seeds. The resulting hay-like material will be stored under cover to dry. For a week the hay will have to be turned three times a day to ensure it dries out. Volunteers to help with the work will be appreciated. In September seed will be spread on Area 16, just uphill from the Daisybank carpark. This will be the first time that the Magnificent Meadows project have tried this experiment in reseeding areas that used to have grassland wildflowers. Seed will be made available to other

sites in the Magnificent Meadows project.

From the point of view of the Borough Council, the **grazing** is progressing well and it appears that we are at a level of grazing that the Common can sustain. It is understood that there may be some culling of animals this year in line with operating the grazing for conventional livestock production. Information from the operation of the grazing will be fed into the discussion of the Grazing Plan, which is in a draft form.



Taking Shelter from the July sun

In order to help solve a problem of overflowing bins in the car parks around the Hill, it is proposed to **install some new bins**. These would be similar to ones used elsewhere in the town. Comments on the new design would be welcome. Examples can be seen via this link: <http://wybone.co.uk/product/wts8d-double-iroko-hardwood-bin/>



New Byway sign Daisybank Road

1700 square metres of the **Salterley Quarry carpark** has successfully been regraded. This carpark had become very rutted but is now much smoother. In addition sterilised stone has been used to resurface Judith's ride near Brownstones Quarry and parts of the Gallops and Cotswold Way near Cowslip Meadow. This will greatly aid walkers when the track is wet.

On June 4th a group of 57 **children from Warden Hill primary school** and 15 associated adults enjoyed an exploration of the Hill ably guided by Wayne Sedgwick and Chris Chevasse, the Borough's Trees Officer. Starting at 9 am the walk took in Tramway Cottage, where the history of the riots was mentioned. The Lime Kilns, Devils Chimney and the Iron Age fort were visited and the view was enjoyed from the Toposcope.

The **restricted byway signs** installed in May appear to be helping to prevent unsuitable vehicles going onto the site although there continue to be problems with vandalism of gates.

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

As a footnote to this item, below is a report of a site visit involving Natural England, Cheltenham Borough, the Grazier and FOLK. This is good news for progress on the Common.

LECKHAMPTON HILL AND CHARLTON KINGS COMMON SSSI: REVIEW OF GRAZING MANAGEMENT (26 MARCH 2015)

The site visit concentrated on looking at the grazing management on Charlton Kings Common. The aim of the management is to deliver the SSSI and HLS objectives through a gradual increase in grazing pressure across the Common so that the invertebrate interest is not detrimentally affected and the challenging site attributes (steep slope, northerly aspect, scree) do not compromise the welfare of the cattle and the condition of the site.

The overall condition of the Common is much improved with evidence of grazing across the whole site and even the steep slopes now showing a reduction in sward height and removal of dead grass (thatch). Additionally, the more accessible lower slopes have not been over grazed or excessively poached. Considerable effort has been made to encourage the cattle to graze some of the less accessible areas of the Common. This has been achieved through a combination of moving the location of the water supply and mineral licks and by cutting scrub to enable the cattle to move freely to these areas. This has been very successful and demonstrates a growing partnership between the Borough Council, the Grazier and FOLK.

It is important that the increase in grazing pressure does not detrimentally affect some of the notable species that may require a longer sward. Hence it may be necessary to fence off small areas where notable species are found during their flowering season or flight period. Local experts should continue to liaise with the Borough Council to ensure these areas are identified and protected as necessary.

It is encouraging that one of the site's rarest species, the nationally declining Duke of Burgundy butterfly, has recently increased in numbers despite it requiring longer sward conditions. It is now considered to be a large population, one of only four in Gloucestershire, with more than 40 adults flying.

Management Recommendations

- the current livestock herd (approx. 20-22 adults with followers) is thought to be appropriate for the site based on all year grazing. Numbers on site will vary and all may need to be removed if weather conditions dictate.
- the location of water points and mineral licks should be used to continue to encourage the cattle to graze less accessible areas of the Common. Further work to improve the tracks and troughs may be required.
- Further scrub clearance, in particular gorse, is required to open up grazing areas and to encourage the cattle to move around the site. Some cutting of straggly gorse re-growth in the sward is required where the aim is for the cattle to graze further.

Paul Hackman, Natural England, March 2015

Introducing Jenny Palmer

As the summer weather encourages us to get out into the fresh air, we managed, in a rare moment in her busy life, to catch Jenny Palmer and ask her about her FOLK membership. Members may have seen Jenny on work parties, chasing butterflies or scrutinising wildflowers on the Hill with her husband John.

When did you join FOLK? To be honest I am not quite sure but I have been a member for six or seven years.



Jenny en route to the Hill

How do you enjoy the Hill? I enjoy walking on the Hill. Sometimes I meet up with my daughter and her dog at Daisy Bank and we have an active hike round the Hill or Common. I particularly enjoy all the wildlife. It is a joy to hear the Yellowhammers in Spring and to do my first butterfly walk of the season.

What are your earliest memories of the Hill? When my children were small we came to the Cotswolds on holiday. We

have a picture of our daughter in a backpack with the Devil's Chimney in the

background. Much later, as newcomers to Gloucestershire, we studied a map of the area before looking at

houses. I love to have a view of Hills, having been brought up with the Weald as a backdrop. We live in Charlton Kings and I have views of Wistley Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

What changes have you noticed over the years? The Hill and Common are much greener these days. When we first came to Cheltenham you could see more bare rock but now the cliff faces have a cover of trees and shrubs. It is less obvious that there are quarries there so the history will not be as visible to visitors.

What is your favourite view of or from the Hill? From our bedroom windows we can see Charlton Kings Common. I really love to look out from the plateau over the top of Cheltenham to the Severn Valley and the landscape beyond. This view is always full of interest.

What is your favourite time of year on the Hill? The Hill has something to offer in all seasons. In the spring there are the birds and wildflowers, in the summer the butterflies are delightful and the winter frosts and occasional snow can make a dramatic scene.

What aspect of the natural history, archaeology or geology of the Hill do you find most interesting? All aspects of the wildlife are interesting to observe and study. I don't know much about the geology. It would be great to see more reptiles on the Hill and I am looking forward to seeing my first Adder.

What does membership of FOLK mean to you? It has been good to get involved in FOLK activities, the work parties and butterfly and wildflower surveying.

What would you hope that FOLK would have achieved on the Hill by its 25th anniversary in 2025? I would like to see FOLK having a bigger membership, which would help it to have more influence. I also hope that we will have achieved a sustainable management of the Hill. As an aside, I hope that something can be done to deal with the problem of litter on the Hill which is a blot on a beautiful place. It would be good for FOLK to organise or be involved in more activities or events on the Hill so that more people could get to know about the Hill and its features.

Brian Phillips a tribute



Brian Phillips

It is with sadness that we report the recent death of Brian Phillips, who has been a long time and stalwart member of FOLK. A good friend of Brian, Pat McGrath, has kindly written a few words about Brian for FOLK members.

Brian's passing has sadly left a huge gap in the lives of his many friends, mine especially. I had known him for over thirty years and in that time he introduced me to the wonders of the wildlife and flowers on Leckhampton Hill. As you probably know his passion was for wild orchids and he has passed some of this passion on to me. Before I met Brian I didn't know an orchid

from a dandelion but now I am a keen orchid spotter as well as other wild flowers.

Brian had strong opinions on the management of the Hill (ask Wayne Sedgwick) and was particularly concerned about overgrazing. As recently as five years ago we counted over 100 Early Purple orchids on the

eastern escarpment and Charlton Kings common, this year there were three. Over the years Brian kept a log of sightings and locations of orchids on the Hill: about ten or eleven species.

He was also a keen bird spotter (not a Twitcher) and would often tell me when he had heard the first Chiff Chaff or Willow Warbler, or whatever, of the spring. He was also a Cotswold Warden and a Cotswold Way warden for many years. He will be sadly missed but I'm sure he enriched the lives of the many people who knew him.

It is understood that Brian's family are considering dedicating a bench on the Hill as a memorial to Brian. Ed.

FOLK Work Party Report summer 2015

In the period covered by this report, March to May 2015, we were reasonably lucky with the weather with no work parties needing to be cancelled, although we did finish one early after it started raining rather persistently. Despite this, we achieved a total of 186 volunteer hours.

Thanks once again to everyone who turned out and donated their time, including a young student who was gaining work experience as part of his qualifications. It is always nice to see such people on the Hill.



Resurfacing Judy's Ride

So, what have we been doing? Well, we started this period in the same way we finished the last – clearing and burning the brash from the felling of ash trees above the woodland walk that runs from the limekilns to below the Devil's Chimney. This is proving to be quite a big job, and we haven't finished it yet, but we decided to have a break and do something else!

We moved on to footpath maintenance on what we call 'Judy's Ride', the footpath that runs from Brownhills Quarry car park through to the centre of the Hill.

Here we cut back encroaching bramble, removed overhanging branches, removed parts of an old wooden fence and cut away some wire that ran across one of the tracks. Following our work, Cheltenham Borough Council's contractors came in and spread a large quantity of stone over the surfaces that had become rather muddy. As a result, we now have a nice, wide, clear and dry path for visitors to use – see above. Enjoy!

Clearing Ash saplings

In addition to working on Judy's Ride, we also cut back scrub around the entrance to Brownstone Quarry car park and on the Cotswold Way above Salterley Quarry car park.

At the end of March we finished off some work we have been slowly nibbling at over the last year or two. That was the removal of ash saplings in the mainly open area above the Bridge car park on Daisybank Road (what we call Area 16) and stacking up the cuttings. There are a lot of Ash trees on the Hill and Ash trees are well



Clearing Ash Saplings

known for producing large quantities of seeds which grow rapidly and can quickly take over an area and shade out other plants and grasses. This was happening in Area 16 and their clearance was part of our work to try to keep this area open (see the photo above, which shows the last small patch of the much larger original stand that we cleared).

At the end of March, representatives from Natural England visited the site to check on progress and declared themselves happy. They also agreed to an extension to the period when scrub removal is allowed. Normally scrub removal should cease by the end of March to

avoid disturbing nesting birds but they agree that in certain areas we could continue to remove some small, isolated scrub bushes until the end of April, provided we checked there were no nesting birds in the area before we started work. The reason we wanted to be able to remove these was that there were small patches of regrowth from previous larger scale scrub clearances which, having become somewhat prickly, the cattle were avoiding resulting in these patches not being grazed as fully as we would like. Therefore, during April, we spent all of our work parties clearing or thinning out these areas which were all located along and slightly above the non-tarmaced section of Daisybank Road.

On one of these work parties we were rather surprised to see two adders alongside and very close to where we had been stacking the cuttings!

During May we spent our work parties burning the cuttings we had piled up during our April work parties. We had some very nice bonfires which burnt well despite the occasional rain showers!



Keeping the Gorse at bay

So, that's what we have been doing recently. What are we planning to do next?

Well, we had thought that we would have to continue our efforts of the last two years to remove significant patches of Hemp Agrimony. However, as I write, there is little sign of this growth so far so maybe we will be spared this year. That doesn't mean we'll have nothing to do. We still have to finish clearing the brash from above the woodland walk and some scrub clearance is required on and around the limekiln ruins. There will be other tasks as well.



Finishing the job with a bonfire

As always you are welcome to join us on one of our work parties. We are a friendly mixed group of male and female members. You can work at your own pace and take a break as and when you wish. We meet at 9.30am at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road, and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours. Tools are provided by FOLK. For your own safety we ask you to bring and wear stout footwear and tough gardening gloves.

We have three FOLK work parties a month. Dates for the next 6 months are printed below.

For further information you can contact Mike on 01242 238790 or Geoff on 01242 244165, or you can look at the 'Work Party' page on our new website (www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) or send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com.

Work party dates for Summer/Autumn 2015

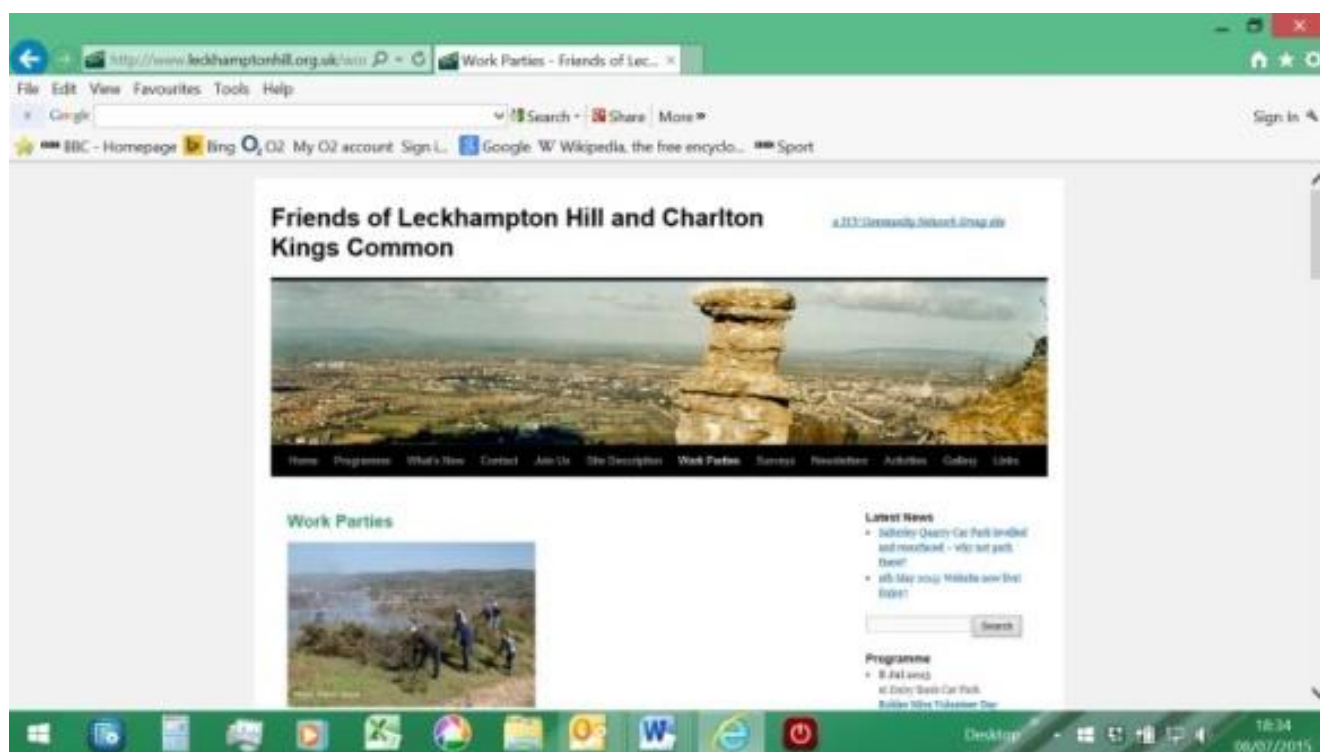
June 2015	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 st	Sunday 28 th
July 2015	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 th	Sunday 26 th
August 2015	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 th
September 2015	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
October 2015	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
November 2015	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd

SMOKE SIGNALS other news from the Hill and Common and the conservation scene.

FOLK website

We have reported in previous editions of FOLKtalk on the development of a website for FOLK. We are now happy and excited to report good progress towards that goal.

Geoff Holt, FOLK Treasurer picked up the batten from Tim Sugrue and has put in place the main components of a good working website.



the main pages include the following:

- The 'Programme' page includes the 2015 work party dates and other events
- On the 'What's On' page there are noteworthy sightings by people on the Hill.
- the 'Contact' page has a general inquiry email to leckhamptonhill@gmail.com. This is monitored. The Membership Secretary, Work Party Coordinator and Web Master have separate email addresses.
- The 'Join Us' page includes a link to a PDF membership application form.

Other pages include: site description, surveys, back copies of the Newsletter, activities a gallery and links to other sites. At the moment some of these pages have only basic information but with members' help we will improve the quality of these pages.

All members are encouraged to have a look at the new site by using the link: www.leckhamptonhill.org and are invited to get involved in building up the website, which will be an important way of publicising FOLK and the work we do.

And finally:

Magnificent Meadows walks June 13th.

On a disappointingly soggy and dull day, Tim Sugrue, who as well as being a FOLK member is a Cotswold warden, led walks around the Hill and Common as part of FOLK's involvement with the Magnificent Meadows project. Whilst the number of walkers was small, Tim pointed out the essential features of the site and was able to point out the differences between the managed and unmanaged areas. A bonus was the spotting of a number of orchid plants, which were admired by the walkers who all came from out of our area. Let's hope for better weather next time.

Best wishes for a speedy recovery to Anne North. Hoping to see Anne at Executive Committee meetings again soon.

Thanks as ever to all our sponsoring organisations: Charlton Kings, Shurdington and Leckhampton and Warden Hill Parish Councils have generously provided grants again this year. Cheltenham and County Cycling Club have recently provided financial support, and Cotswold Conservation Board and Cheltenham Borough Council give continuous support for which we are very grateful.

About FOLK

FOLK is an organisation set up to work with landowners, to promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. We support sustainable recreational and agricultural use of the land.

We welcome new members to support and help us in this important work. If you wish to join (either as an individual or as a family) please contact any of the people listed below. Annual membership is £6 per year for an individual or £9 for a family.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition later in 2013 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to: whalley-p@o2.co.uk Articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time would be most welcome

Contact FOLK

John Harvey, Chairman: 01242 520053

Geoff Holt Treasurer and Working Parties: 01242 244165

Mike Donnelly Working Parties 01242 238790

Anne North, Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767

Find the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common on
www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk and on Facebook

The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee